

Three Birds Casual, Inc.

Three Birds Casual was founded in 1999 by three Hoosiers, in the garage of company president Tad Varga, as a way to combine a passion for travel with a hobby for collecting.



THREE BIRDS CASUAL AT A GLANCE

Year Established:

1999

Employees:

12 worldwide

Leadership:

Tad Varga, President (right)

Victor Lewis, Vice President (left)



“At first we only imported antique bird cages—that’s partially where the company name came from,” said Varga, “but we expanded rapidly and soon began importing high-quality outdoor living products, including premier teak furniture. It wasn’t long before we outgrew the garage and grew into a full-time business.”

For the next few years, the company teetered on the edge of making the jump to the next level. “The thing is, we had a passion for the business but no real business plan,” explained Varga, “and we knew if we were going to take the next step and really grow as a business, we needed a solid plan for expansion.” In particular, they needed a plan for identifying and attracting an investor because, according to Varga, “we needed capital in order to build inventory and build the business.”

For help in developing that plan, Varga and his partners contacted Whitley County’s Small Business & Entrepreneurship Initiative (SBEI) program for advice.

JOINING THE SBEI PROGRAM

With help from the SBEI program, Three Birds Casual was able to develop and implement a long-term business plan, including, said Varga, “putting the wheels in motion to bring in an equity investor.” The SBEI program helped to identify potential investors and facilitated the necessary connections. As a result, Three Birds closed a deal with an equity investor in May 2012.

ACHIEVEMENTS WITH SBEI

As a result of the infusion of capital and the subsequent increase in capacity, Three Birds signed a deal to sell premier outdoor furniture in L.L. Bean’s stores and through their catalog; the first shipments went out in the summer of 2012. The company also inked a deal to sell online through Bed Bath & Beyond and in Brookstone’s 1,300 stores nationwide. By the fall of 2012, business had improved to the point that Varga and his partners made the decision to increase warehouse space by purchasing a building to replace the one they were currently leasing.

The staff of Three Birds Casual now includes three full-time positions, one part-time, and five to six seasonal employees in Northeast Indiana, with an additional 12 sales people worldwide. The company is anticipating making at least one new hire locally in 2013. “By the fall of 2012, business had improved to the point that my partners and I decided to increase warehouse space, which we plan to do in the fall of 2013 by leasing a larger facility” said Varga.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

“The Whitley County Economic Development Council and the SBEI program have been instrumental in our growth,” said Varga. “Their team of experts served as the mentors we needed to move our business to the next level and we consider the relationship to be long-term and ongoing. Engaging with the SBEI program was a smart move for Three Birds—it would be a smart move for any company.”